

The Desert

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VOL. I.

THE HORRORS OF OAKENDALE ABBEY.

A ROMANCE.

(Continued from No. 14.)

The amusements, which filled up her time, served, in some degree, to drive from her mind those gloomy ideas, which, when indulged by indolent musings, never fail to divest the mind of its proper energy, and to cast a shade of melancholy discontent upon every object. Her fancy, indeed, would sometimes wander back to past scenes, and recollection would exhibit the youthful hours when, with her dear Eugene, she passed whole days, delighted and beloved, unconscious of the evil that awaited her, and of those many dark hours which had succeeded them; that Eugene should never have made any inquiry, or sent one letter to her before she left France, was what she could not place to any account but that of her evil destiny; it was strange and unexpected; yet she was sure his heart was faithful, and some untoward accident had been the cause why two hearts, so firmly united, and formed for each other, were now so totally divided and torn asunder.

These were sad reflections, and she indulged them as little as possible.

As the spring advanced, Mrs. Greville shewed her many beautiful parts of the country, and they were visited by the distant neighbours. Sir George and lady Orland were expected; and Laura, though she knew not why, felt a cheering hope as the time approached. At length the evening arrived, which brought Sir George and his lady to the Grove. Mrs. Greville presented Laura to them as a very valuable acquisition, which fortune had bestowed upon her since she last saw them.

After the usual salutations and compliments, lady Orland stepped back, and led in a lady, saying, "I have likewise an acquisition to introduce to you;" when Laura, turning her eyes to the lady as she advanced, they were fascinated with the

sight of her dear and ever-valued Madame Du Frene. The joy was mutual, and they rushed into each others arms with unfeigned transports of delight.

Lady Orland had received Madame Du Frene into her house in the capacity of Governess to her only daughter; and she had discovered so many amiable traits in her character, and her whole conduct and deportment had been so uniformly calculated for the trust reposed in her, that lady Orland never wished to consider her in any light, but that of a polite and accomplished visitor; and had given her so many proofs of her friendship and regard, as gave her every reason to forget she was an emigrant. Madame Du Frene had frequently mentioned and lamented the fate of her beloved Laura, and her joy was now completed in finding her under the protection of the worthy Mrs. Greville.

After having related to each other their various adventures since the time of their separation, Madame Du Frene told Laura, that in one of the emigrants, whom chance had thrown in her way to London, she had met with the woman, to whose care Laura was intrusted, in her voyage from India; that she was now servant at a hotel in London, was ready to give any testimony concerning her charge as far as she knew; but she was in daily expectation of a brother from the East-Indies, who would bring a more particular account of the name and parents of Laura, as she had sent him word of her having been taken prisoner, and stripped of every thing that could direct her to find her relations.

Laura's heart glowed with gratitude to Providence for having so miraculously preserved her, and raised her up friends in a country, where as yet she had no knowledge of such a claim; and she doubted not but the dispensations of his all-ruling power would enable her to find some being to whom she could prove her kindred, and pay that filial duty with which her heart overflowed.

Thus was Laura situated during the transactions that had been passing at Oakendale-Abbey.

The society at Mrs. Greville's wanted not any addition. If the idea of Eugene

sometimes crossed the fancy of Laura with a painful sensation, she suppressed even the sigh which the memory of past scenes, and the conviction that they would not return, would occasion; for she knew that the happiness of this world must admit of much alloy, and her present situation was such, that she had no other cause for regret.

Meantime lord Oakendale was indefatigable in his endeavours to recover his niece, and had at last received the pleasing intelligence that she was at Mrs. Greville's. He lost not a moment to go there, charmed with the knowledge that she was under such a respectable protection.

It was after one sultry day that Laura, with the rest of Mrs. Greville's family, were sitting near the point of a rock, contemplating the prospect which commanded the view of a beautiful lake. She was reflecting upon her happy situation, and only indulging one fearful and distant wish for a certain object ever dear to her remembrance, when a servant, addressing Mrs. Greville, announced lord Oakendale.

Laura started, and screaming, said, "Ah! hide me, hide me, from that wicked man!"

"Fear nothing, my love," said Mrs. Greville; "you have friends here sufficient to protect you, and Sir George will wait upon his lordship to know his business."

Sir George instantly arose to obey his aunt, and promised Laura that she should never be carried from them whilst he had an arm to defend her. He instantly left them, and Laura kept clinging to Madame Du Frene when they perceived lord Oakendale and Sir George advancing towards them.

Laura trembled, but was determined to summon up courage to support and exert herself, when lord Oakendale flew to embrace her with the appellation of my dearest niece.

Laura stood amazed, and fancied that her organs of hearing deceived her, or that lord Oakendale was practising some new deception; but when he stood for a moment in silent admiration, and she saw the tears roll down his manly cheeks,

a sympathetic tear relieved her bosom, and a secret impulse chased away her fears. Lord Oakendale, in a few words, explained the mystery; and she had the inexpressible felicity of embracing an uncle.

Lord Oakendale pressed her to his bosom with parental fondness; and drawing from thence a miniature, suspended by a ribband, he held it to Laura, saying, "Behold your father's just resemblance in this picture, which was torn from thy infant neck by ruffians; yet presented by thy penitent uncle."

Laura received it with joy, and she knelt to her uncle with filial love and obedience. Happiness was every where diffused around, and her heart glowed with laudable pride when Lord Oakendale thanked Mrs. Greville for her unbounded kindness to his niece, Laura Carleton, for such he had no doubt she was; he therefore passed a few days at Mrs. Greville's, in joys to which he had hitherto been a stranger; for, although Lord Oakendale was now near fifty years of age, he had ever been debarred from the felicity of domestic society. He found Laura (when she was divested of fear and embarrassment) a charming companion. When she related her history and sufferings, he could never sufficiently admire her strength of mind, her resolution, and, above all, her resignation. In short, he perfectly doated on her, and lost no time in sending for the testimony of the woman's brother, who had brought her over, and of whom madame Du Frene had spoken. The man was lately arrived, and brought with him a duplicate of the paper Mr. Martin had before delivered to lord Oakendale, written in his brother's own hand.

Madame Du Frene was ready to affirm, that Laura was the identical child her husband had brought from the French prison; but, besides all this testimony, Laura's own remembrance and account furnished the strongest proof. The confirmation was beyond a doubt; and if there had been any remaining testimony wanting from coincidence of circumstances, the uncommon likeness she bore, not only to her father, but to the picture of her grandmother, which had so attracted poor Eugene in Oakendale abbey, was proof sufficient; and the fondness which lord Oakendale felt for the only offspring of his family, wanted no corroborating testimony that their blood flowed from the same source. Indeed, when he looked back upon the strange events which had brought them together, and made known their affinity, he blessed the hand of heaven which had so miraculously saved him from one of the

worst of crimes. And as he gazed, with unspeakable fondness, on the fair form of his lovely niece, he considered her as a rich blessing sent to comfort the remainder of his days here; and, by working a reformation in his conduct, to give him hopes for those of hereafter.

Lord Oakendale testified his most grateful acknowledgments to madame Du Frene for her maternal care of Laura, and to whose good instructions he placed the uncommon merit she possessed. When he gave a recital of the search which he had made to investigate the mystery of Oakendale abbey, he engaged the fixed attention of his auditors; but when he came to give the account of finding Eugene, and of his long confinement in the dreary vault, the description he gave of his person and manners, convinced Laura that it could be no other than her dear Eugene; the recital of whose cruel imprisonment and sufferings, softened her heart with the tenderest pity, and rendered him still more dear.

When lord Oakendale mentioned the poor emaciated figure in the grated room, whom Mr. F—— called Eugene, Laura arose with great emotion, and expressed a trembling impatience for the conclusion of a fate in which she was so nearly interested. Lord Oakendale took but little notice of her perturbation; he would not allow his heart for a moment to admit the idea of an union with Eugene. Whatever might be his merits, a something, relating, no doubt, to his birth, made his mind recoil at the bare supposition; and yet Laura, with all her happiness, and all her titles, was but a wretch, if divided from that her fondest hope; but she was now to engage in a new scene.

Lord Oakendale and his niece, having gratefully expressed their thanks to Mrs. Greville and all her family, for their hospitality and kindness, took their leave of the grove, and set out for London, where lord Oakendale welcomed Laura as mistress of his house, and sole heiress to the fortunes of Oakendale. She was visited by a numerous train of company; some, who had heard her story, from real regard and friendship; others, from curiosity, and a desire of finding some flaw in a character to conspicuously superior! But her fascinating manners gained her universal admiration. She shone in the most brilliant circles in which her eyes continually wandered, in pursuit of an object dearer to her than all the world.

It happened one evening, at an assembly, to which she went unaccompanied by lord Oakendale, that she heard lord Vincent announced. Her heart fluttered at

the sound, and, in a moment after, she beheld her loved Eugene.

He did not immediately perceive her; but the moment his eyes encountered that fair form, which his heart had ever adored, he waited not for the ceremony of a formal introduction. He made his way to her; he seized her hand, and for a few moments they forgot that the eyes of a whole assembly were rivetted upon them.

Laura was covered with blushes; and some of those malignant spirits (who, envious of her charms, and the splendor in which she shone, were continually upon the watch to lower her merit) instantly took the hint, and a burst of ill-natured whispers assailed her ear. A lady, who was her chaperon, relieved her embarrassment, by making room for Eugene to sit by her, with whom she entered into chat, as if she had been one of his most intimate acquaintance, although she had never seen him before.

This not only made Laura feel more easy, but also gave Eugene an opportunity of uttering a thousand tender inquiries, in which his heart was truly interested. The matter of his writing to her was cleared up to the entire satisfaction of both parties, who had each lamented the silence of the other. The subject of the abbey was but slightly touched upon. It was evident they had both been confined there at the same time; and this idea afforded sensations too tender to be discussed in their present situation.

Eugene could not withdraw himself from the side of Laura, notwithstanding she represented to him the impropriety of so particular a conduct; and it had, indeed, given occasion for a thousand observations replete with witticisms and sarcasm. "Two such strange adventurers ought to come together!—They had made out a most delightful romantic story!—It was pity so much invention should ever be divided!—How they must triumph at having so finely duped the two doating lords!"

Such irony as this was the most prevailing conversation of the different parties who formed the assembly; but some few there were who saw them in a more candid and favourable light, who admired their virtues, and seriously wished to see them happily united.

Laura returned home with her spirits uncommonly exhilarated. Lord Oakendale observed it; and, as she always gave him an account of whatever happened to her when he was not present, she would not now omit the circumstance of meeting with Eugene; well knowing that, had she not thought it right to have no con-

cealments of this nature, he would have heard it from common report; and she likewise knew that no acquaintance could be continued without lord Oakendale's approbation.

As soon as she had related the account of their meeting, and had candidly expressed her pleasure at seeing Eugene, lord Oakendale bit his lip; his countenance betrayed evident displeasure; and, after taking three or four turns across the room, he said, "I hope, Laura, your heart has no share in the interests of this Eugene; there are circumstances in relation to that young man, which should make such a connexion extremely obnoxious to me; besides, I have other views for you."—Having said this, he wished her good night with less tenderness than usual.

The moment he was gone Laura burst into tears. The opposition lord Oakendale had expressed, gave her extreme uneasiness; and she had so much of the obliquity inherent to human nature in her composition, that this very opposition only drew closer the links her inclinations had formed. Her fond imagination had never before seen Eugene in so fair a light. What were titles, honours, fortune, she had almost said friends, in comparison with her loved Eugene! To him she would sacrifice all her hopes, and all her prospects; and with these resolutions she retired to rest; but her mind was disturbed; and, when she saw her uncle in the morning, his disconcerted brow bespoke uneasiness; of which thinking herself the cause, she relaxed something of her resolves, and offered him the most soothing attentions.

It was not very likely to suppose that lord Oakendale could wish to see Eugene the husband of his niece. He had, indeed, acted in concert with lord Vincent at the discovery of the mystery at Oakendale Abbey; but since that time all intercourse between them was broken off, and he never wished to have it renewed by any circumstance, still less by that of a union between Eugene and Laura, whom he loved with passionate fondness; and would have made her any sacrifice, but that on which alone her happiness depended.

Thus was their felicity interrupted. Eugene and Laura sometimes met, and never without lamenting the cruelty of their destiny. She returned lord Oakendale's kindness by the most dutiful attention; but she could not bring herself to renounce her lover; neither would she marry him without her uncle's consent. She hoped time would make an alteration in his sentiments, and from that hope she drew comfort and resignation to herself; but

could not so easily impress it upon her more impatient lover.

Lord Vincent loved Eugene too well to oppose his wishes; though, perhaps, he might, as well as lord Oakendale, have formed connexions more pleasing to himself; yet he acquiesced in all his son approved, of whom he was extremely proud, and had, by an act of parliament, empowered him to take his name, and succeed to his estates; he was, therefore, in point of rank and fortune, a match for the daughter, or niece, of the proudest Peer; yet the circumstances of his birth were such as could not fail to be obnoxious to the Oakendale family, and could by no power be done away; though his father's interest at Court was such, that (as the immediate heir to his title was now dead) he had obtained a new patent, entailing his Peerage on his natural son, Eugene.

Meantime lord Oakendale found his health decline with rapidity; and he formed the fond wish of seeing his beloved Laura settled in marriage with some man worthy her vast fortune, and still greater merit. He considered her attachment to Eugene as a childish partiality, which would yield to better prospects and a lover of his choice. With these ideas he introduced the son of his particular friend, Sir Charles Burlington. He was a young man of good character and handsome person; but he was five years younger than Laura, and was taken from the University without having seen more of the world than a school-boy, in order to facilitate so desirable an union; for, although Sir Charles had a very good unincumbered estate, which must descend to this young man, yet a match with Laura Carleton was beyond their most sanguine expectations.

When he was introduced to Laura, she could scarcely prevent her countenance from shewing marks of contempt and ridicule at the idea of his being her husband; for his appearance was more childish and youthful than was common at his age, and the embarrassment he felt on the occasion added to his juvenile address. She received him with politeness, but with a determined resolution never to consider him in any other light but that of an acquaintance.

Sir Charles Burlington was delighted with the prospect, and overwhelmed Miss Carleton with unmeaning compliments and overstrained civility. He might, indeed, be said to be courting for his son, who sat staring at Laura without once venturing to give an opinion or utter a sentence. Even lord Oakendale himself was conscious of the impropriety and dis-

proportion between them; but the fear of seeing his niece united to Eugene would have reconciled him to yet greater disparity.

Laura avoided as much as possible all particular conversation with her uncle. She saw his health decline fast, and she could not bear the idea of giving him uneasiness. She gave up all her time to attendance on him, and could seldom be prevailed on to leave him. One night she went to the Opera, where she was met by Eugene, who placed himself by her; and in a few minutes young Burlington appeared in the pit, and, without any ceremony, thrust himself between them.

Laura felt herself angry, and Eugene, having gained a place on the other side of her, asked "if he should turn the boy out of the house?" which Burlington having heard, resented with all the impetuous fury and violence of youth; and not content with abusing Eugene, in very gross terms, he called to some Oxonians, his friends, who were in the gallery, to come and give their assistance to a devilish row that was going to begin.

Laura grew alarmed; the eyes of the audience were turned round towards them, and several glasses in the boxes were employed to bring a nearer view of the contending parties.

The lady, who came with Laura, had two daughters with her, who had never before been at an Opera; it would, therefore have been a cruel mortification to have taken them away before it was nearly half over; neither was her carriage come for her.

But Laura could not bear to be the object of wonder, and, perhaps, ridicule; and she earnestly requested Eugene to get her a chair, and she would go home.

Eugene readily obeyed her command, and led her out of the pit, followed by Burlington, who expressed himself in the most childish and unhandsome terms. The truth was, he had been drinking, and flushed with liquor. The idea of being the ostensible lover of Laura, gave him airs of boyish consequence, that had disturbed the pleasure of the evening, but could not be considered in a serious light.

Eugene regarded it as no otherwise worth his notice, than as it had discomposed Laura, and deprived him sooner of her company. This he was telling her as he was going to put her into the chair, when young Burlington advanced, and seized her hand, which she drew from him with a look and expression of resentment; when just as he was about again rudely to take hold of her, one of the chairmen instantly perceived, and immediately

knocked him down. Eugene, without paying any regard to the circumstance, put her into the chair, and attended her to lord Oakendale's house, in Portland-Place. He waited to see that she was perfectly recovered, and heard the following discourse from the chairman, who had knocked down young Burlington:

"Arrah, my dear young lady, I hope you will not be after being angry at my lending a blow to the lad who was after being impertinent; because, my dear shoul, we be old acquaintance. Arrah sure I cannot mistake, when I took you for an angel sent to deliver poor Patrick from purgatory; aye you're the same dear cratur that opened the door, and let me make my escape after I was dead, and was going to be disjointed by the hell-hounds at Oakendale; and you be too kind hearted to bring me again into trouble, seeing as I would be after sarving you with my heart's blood."

Laura stared at this harangue of the chairman, and after some recollection recognized, in the figure and features of this Hibernian, the very same man she had beheld in so frightful a situation in Oakendale-Abbey; when, as he said, he had been hanged, and cut down before he was dead; and, having been thrown into this room, was reserved for dissection; when recovering, her opening the door released him! She was much surprised at the circumstance, to which she could not but give credit. She gave him some money, and desired he would come again the next day, when she assured him no harm should befall him; but she knew that lord Oakendale wished to see and converse with every person who could give him any information of the transactions at the Abbey.

Patrick faithfully promised to attend in the morning, by which time Laura prepared lord Oakendale for so extraordinary a visitor; who, when he arrived, gave the following account of himself, "That he was born at Carrick, in Ireland, and at a proper age was bound apprentice to a shoemaker, with whom he nearly served his time; but getting acquainted with several bad people, he ran away from his master, and joined the White Boys, with whom he committed several outrages and violent depredations, for which he was frequently afraid of being brought to justice, but good fortune always befriended him, and, after various escapes, he came to London, where he engaged in ignoble employments, and at last served

in the honourable station of lamp-lighter!

"That one evening, when he was lighting the lamps at lord Oakendale's door, a female, from one of the balcony windows, accosted him inquired his birth and education, and asked him, if he should not like to fill a more lucrative and honourable employment than that of lamp-lighter? He replied, 'he was ready to undertake any business whereby he might raise his fortune, except that of committing murder, and that he could never bring himself to do;' upon which she assured him, 'that it was not to commit murder; that she wished him to change his profession; but only to follow, and bring her an exact account of a certain young Gentleman, whose abode she pointed out, and for which service he should be very handsomely rewarded.'

Nothing could better suit his inclinations and his genius, than such an idle profitable business. He accordingly served her in this capacity with such indefatigable zeal, that he gave her an exact account of all the young Gentleman engaged in; and, about a fortnight after this, he was sent down to Cumberland to give information to some particular persons that the above-mentioned young Gentleman would be in such a place at such a time, where, he believed, he was afterwards taken and detained. That after he had undergone an examination, as to his fidelity and secrecy, he was employed to assist those wretches, and pests of society, called resurrection men, who brought numbers of bodies to Oakendale-Abbey. They were generally received in the night, and the person, who was the chief superintendant, and who paid the men who procured the bodies, was named Marcel, and was brother to the woman of that name, who lived with lady Oakendale, and was the same that spoke to him when he was lighting the lamp.

Patrick continued to inform his lordship that he grew tired of the employment, and thought it a very shocking one; he therefore ran away, and joined a set of coiners in the neighbourhood of Penrith, where they were soon after discovered, taken, and brought to condign punishment.

At his trial he saw his old master Marcel, at the sight of whom (to use his own expression) his blood ran cold; for he supposed he was only come to watch for his condemnation, and like a crow after carrion, bespeak his body. This was really the case; for Patrick said he remembered nothing after the fatal words of condemnation had passed upon him. His mind was

all in a state of confusion; and, if any thoughts did occur, they were only on the wretched state to which his body would be subjected after he was dead; nor could the clergyman, who attended him, impress any ideas of that more immortal and immaterial part of him, which could not suffer by the hands of men.

The first idea of recollection he experienced (after the noise of the crowd and mob that attended him to the gallows had ceased) was of extreme pain in his head and neck, and a violent oppression upon his lungs. He struggled for a few seconds, and gained respiration; a mist before his eyes seemed to vanish, and he recovered sufficient sight to perceive that he was in a dismal room with a dead body hung up on one side of it. It instantly occurred to him that he was in the abbey. He was horribly frightened, and he tried to articulate; but found his throat so swelled that he could only utter a gurgling kind of sound; when in a moment the door of the room gently opened, and a beautiful creature entered, whom he supposed to be an inhabitant of that world into which he had been launched; yet, notwithstanding the appearance of this fair object, his first idea was that of making his escape, which he instantly effected by passing through the door she had opened. Transient as was the glance he had of her countenance, it nevertheless made an impression never to be erased, and the remembrance of this fair image coming to release him from a place which contained all the horrors of death, created in him a penitence for his past crimes, which would, he hoped, in some degree, atone for the commission of them.

After this he ran as fast as his legs could carry him, till night overtook his steps, and he laid down upon the grass till morning, when he asked for a crust of bread, and a draught of water, at a small cottage, from whence he begged his way up to London, where he has ever since been in honest employment, and has sincerely and truly repented of his past crimes. When he saw Laura handed out of the opera house by Eugene, he instantly remembered them both; and the strong propensity he had to speak to her, got the better of all decorum.

Thus ended the narrative of Patrick O'Dennis, at which lord Oakendale expressed much surprise. He handsomely rewarded Patrick for his trouble, and strongly recommended to him to persevere in his good resolutions.

(Concluded in No. 16.)